

## **Avoid Communications Chaos**

We have so many different ways to communicate with one another. We can pick up the phone and call using either a land line or a cell phone; we can send an email using our computers or our various handheld devices and we can still send a written note on an actual piece of paper. Does having all of these options make communications easier? Not necessarily. Sometimes we still experience communication chaos.

Communication chaos can be avoided through the use of effective communication. Effective communication is organized communication. Think about an individual you know who consistently gets their point across. Chances are they are not just lucky. They have learned to communicate strategically. Read on to see how you can be more effective too.

### **Know how your recipients prefer to receive information**

How do you know this, are you supposed to read minds? No, just ask. When someone joins your team, find out whether they prefer emails or phone calls or in-person discussions. Whenever possible try to accommodate their preference. Reconfirm preferences with individuals. It may be that their preferences have changed or perhaps they like your emails better than your voice mails.

### **Have a specific desired result in mind**

Before you draft an email, letter or make a phone call, organize your thoughts. You may want to do this on paper or rehearse it out loud, but have an idea of what you are going to say and what you need from the recipient of your communication. If you are leading a meeting, ALWAYS have an agenda. If you are presenting, rehearse. Others will be appreciative, look at the time and confusion you save us all.

### **Check comprehension levels**

When you are in the midst of a conversation, presentation or meeting, include comments or questions that help you assess how well your message is being comprehended. In a conversation take time to restate what you understand, ask questions or ask others to summarize their understanding of the conversation. In a presentation, be sure to revisit and summarize key points more than once.

### **Communicate responsibly**

Listen when others are speaking and ask questions. If you do not understand what they are saying or if you cannot hear them, speak up. Be responsible for your role in the communication. Read written communications carefully and ask for clarification as-needed.

Answer emails, phone calls and other communications in a timely manner. Do not make people seek you out for a reply. Keep track of pending communications and note when responses are due.

### **What if I am the victim of a chaotic communicator?**

You cannot control others, but you can try to help them improve their skills. If the chaotic communicator is open to feedback, talk to them about their communication style privately. Give specific examples where you see an opportunity for improvement. Give them specific examples of techniques to use for improvement.

If they are not open to feedback, then draw upon your skills to manage the situation. If they tell long rambling stories, interrupt and ask clarifying questions. Repeat back to them what you think they are saying. If they facilitate meetings without agendas, ask in advance (or at the very least at the start of the meeting) for the meeting objectives and how you can participate. Feel free to help control a runaway meeting.

Remember, effective communication takes practice and planning.